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ABSTRACT

Research conducted on career counseling with African Americans has centered on a few main themes. One theme is that career development models and inventories are based upon the White middle-class American male. Therefore, these models may not be relevant for minority individuals. Second, differences between African American culture and majority culture are often overlooked in career counseling. A third theme focuses on the relationship between racial identity development and vocational identity. Suggestions for further research have included examining the impact of socioeconomic status on career choices and considering not only the culture of a student, but also his/her uniqueness as an individual. In addition, a number of recommendations to accommodate the culture of African Americans in career counseling are proposed. First, further research should be conducted on both career development inventories and models to determine their applicability to African Americans. Second, studying the differences between the meaning of work and status for African Americans and for Whites is suggested. Third, African American students should select successful role models for themselves instead of a career counselor doing so. Finally, the relationship between one's stage of racial/cultural identity development and one's level of vocational development can be examined. (Author)

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Running head: CAREER COUNSELING WITH AFRICAN AMERICANS

Career Counseling with African Americans: How Far Have We Really Come?

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Abstract

Research conducted on career counseling with African Americans has centered on a few main themes. One theme is that career development models and inventories are based upon the White, middle-class American male. Therefore, these models may not be relevant for minority individuals. Second, differences between African American culture and majority culture are often overlooked in career counseling. A third theme focuses on the relationship between racial identity development and vocational identity. Suggestions for further research have included examining the impact of socioeconomic status on career choices and considering not only the culture of a student, but also his/her uniqueness as an individual. In addition, we propose a number of recommendations to accommodate the culture of African Americans in career counseling. First, further research should be conducted on both career development inventories and models to determine their applicability to African Americans. Second, we suggest studying the differences between the meaning of work and status for African Americans and for Whites. Third, African American students should select successful role models for themselves instead of a career counselor doing so. Finally, the relationship between one's stage of racial/cultural identity development (R/CID) and one's level of vocational development can be examined.

Career Counseling with African Americans: How Far Have We Really Come?

Considerable research and review articles have been done regarding career counseling with African American students; however, much of this research tends to center on a few main themes and does not appear to expand heuristically over time. These main themes include the lack of generality of career counseling inventories and models, the omission of variables unique to African American culture, and the consideration of racial identity development and its impact on vocational choice. A critical analysis performed by the authors will critique past research and will make recommendations to update and enhance career counseling with African Americans.

Current Issues

Career Development Models

First, although African Americans are the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (Bowman, 1993), career development inventories and models have largely overlooked this population. Donald Super's popular model of career development, for example, does not specifically consider race and ethnicity, although it is flexible enough to incorporate these variables (Fouad & Arbona, 1994). Existing models of life-span development, career counseling, and career development are based on a White male prototype and are heavily influenced by middle-class

American culture (Cheatham, 1990; Hendricks, 1994; Kimbrough & Salomone, 1993; Sperber Richie, 1992). Thus, these models may be applied inappropriately to groups other than White middle-class American males. Even the meaning of a career itself and career choice are based on majority American culture, and those who define careers differently are seen as disadvantaged (Kimbrough & Salomone, 1993). That "an occupation provides a person with intrinsic satisfaction and opportunities for expression of self" (Hendricks, 1994, p. 119) is actually an assumption, rather than a fact.

In the literature, studies of career counseling and vocational development often fail to report the ethnicity of the participants, even when many are in fact members of ethnic minority groups. As a result, it is questionable as to whether or not findings from such studies are relevant for non-White, non middle-class populations (Bowman, 1993). In the practice of career counseling, use of the traditional dyadic mode of counseling may not be as effective with African Americans as perhaps other forms of counseling, such as group counseling, may be. This can be attributed to the tendency of African Americans to be more group-oriented than Whites (Sperber Richie, 1992).

Career Development Inventories

Inventories used in career counseling, such as measures of career maturity, have been assumed to be valid for both African

American and White students even though it appears there may be significant group differences in favor of Whites (Westbrook & Sanford, 1991). Obviously, any career inventories that are biased in such a manner are not appropriate for use with ethnic minorities (Hawks & Muha, 1991). Since career maturity measures are widely used at the high school level, it is important that they be valid for all students, including African Americans (Westbrook & Sanford, 1991).

For example, one of the most popular of these measures is the Career Maturity Inventory (CMI; Crites, 1978). The CMI measures both career choice competencies and career choice attitudes. The Competency Scale, which includes five subscales, measures cognitive variables that are used in choosing a vocation. The Attitude Scale, also consisting of five subscales, measures subjective reactions and elicits feelings about making a career choice (Fouad, 1988). Several researchers have proposed that the CMI may not be valid for all populations (e.g., Cheatham, 1990; Fouad & Keeley, 1992; Westbrook & Sanford, 1991). Results of the previously mentioned Westbrook and Sanford (1991) study found that White students scored significantly higher than African American students on several subscales. These results could lead one to the conclusion that African American students are less vocationally mature than Whites or that these measures are not appropriate for use with African American students. Fouad

and Keeley (1992), for instance, found that low scores of career maturity occur more with minority youth, but are not necessarily related to poor work performance.

Culture

The second major theme expressed in the literature regarding career counseling with African Americans is that African American culture differs from majority culture on several aspects which are often overlooked in career counseling. Perhaps the most important aspect to consider is that of language (Bowman, 1993). According to Sue and Sue (1990), African Americans rely heavily upon contextual and nonverbal cues when they communicate, whereas Whites rely much less on context and more on the actual words spoken. The African American individual's increased reliance upon context and decreased reliance on words while communicating can be misconstrued as a lack of intelligence by those unaware of this style of communication.

Other variables often overlooked with regard to African Americans are those involving values. For example, within African American culture, cooperation, group success, and sensitivity to interpersonal matters are often valued more than individual success. This perspective is contrary to mainstream American ideas, which typically emphasize individuality, competition, and uniqueness (Cheatham, 1990; Sue & Sue, 1990). As a result of these contrasting ideologies, definitions of status for African

American culture and White culture differ. Whereas Whites define status in terms of wealth, education, and power, African Americans define higher status as holding a steady job, providing for family, and supporting the church (Kimbrough & Salomone, 1993).

Another factor unique to African American culture is due to the fact that African American women are actually members of two minority groups. This dual membership is often termed double jeopardy, since these women sometimes face both racism and sexism. As a result of this dual role, African American women often use coping strategies that are different from those used by White women. African American women, for example, use prayer as a coping mechanism more frequently than do White women. African American women use different and fewer means of coping than White women (Sperber Richie, 1992). With regard to career interventions for the African American woman, several address women, while others address ethnic minorities. However, interventions typically are not designed to address both of these factors (Bowman, 1993).

Unfortunately, there are also some negative factors unique to the African American culture. In a survey conducted by the National Career Development Association, African Americans were more likely to report needing assistance in obtaining information about jobs than were Whites (Brown, Minor, & Jepsen, 1991). All

ethnic groups surveyed expressed a need for greater emphasis on career development in schools, with African Americans reporting this more often than any of the other ethnic groups. Once they are out of school, African Americans are plagued with consistently high unemployment rates, a rate which fluctuates over time among Whites (Bowman, 1993).

Racial Identity Development

A third focus of research on career counseling with African American students has been racial identity development. Sue and Sue (1990) have proposed the Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model (R/CID), which consists of five stages: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness. The conformity stage is characterized by the minority individual's acceptance of majority values over his/her own. In the dissonance stage, the minority individual gradually begins to question the presumed superiority of the majority culture to his/her own. Identification with the minority person's own culture and total rejection of the dominant culture constitutes resistance and immersion. When the minority individual begins to realize that his/her needs do not always match the needs of the minority culture, he/she has moved into the stage of introspection. Finally, the minority individual reaches a point where he/she is able to choose aspects of the majority and minority cultures that fit him/her. He/she has

gained a sense of personal autonomy.

Racial identity development may in itself be a developmental task influencing the career development process (Fouad & Arbona, 1994). Minorities must come to terms not only with their vocational identity, but also with their racial identity. The extent to which one's stage of racial identity affects his/her vocational development and vice versa are unknown.

Recommendations

There have been many suggestions for further research and also for the improvement of career counseling with African Americans. Some of these recommendations include using role models that match the ethnicity of the student, examining the impact of socioeconomic status on career choices, and considering not only the culture of the student, but also his/her uniqueness as an individual; however as discussed, more research is needed.

First, while some research has been conducted on both career development inventories and models to determine their applicability to African Americans, this is not sufficient. More effort in establishing the validity of these is required.

A second recommendation is to study the differences between the meaning of work and status for African Americans and for Whites. As was previously mentioned, one indication of high status in the African American community is support of one's church. Therefore, the relationship between an individual's

involvement with a church and/or community and his/her level of vocational development could be studied. As a result of such a study, encouragement of involvement in church and civic activities could become an effective career development intervention. Additional benefits to increased involvement in church and/or community are more exposure to different occupations and work environments and an opportunity to develop contacts at places of employment. These contacts may even lead to careers otherwise not attainable, which is particularly encouraging given the high unemployment rate among African Americans.

A third recommendation entails the use of role models for African American students. While "successful" role models of ethnic and cultural backgrounds similar to African American students have been utilized in career counseling, perhaps it would be more beneficial for a student to select a role model that he/she deems successful instead of a career counselor doing so. An African American student's perception of a successful professional might differ from that of his/her counselor, especially if they are from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

A final recommendation is to examine the relationship between one's stage of R/CID (Sue & Sue, 1990) and one's level of vocational development. More specifically, we suggest using the

R/CID stages in career counseling to predict appropriate career interventions needed. Research is now showing that the high failure-to-return rate of African American clients in counseling seems linked to the counselor's inability to assess the racial identity of the client (Sue & Sue, 1990). Since this is the case in the counseling relationship, we propose that these findings may also occur in career counseling as well. An awareness of the R/CID stages can better prepare career counselors in their interventions with African American clients. If research is conducted to assess the relationship between a student's place among the R/CID stages and his/her level of vocational development, then one would be better able to tailor career interventions and strategies to each student. In conclusion, although the implications of both the counselor's and client's stage of racial/cultural identity development have been discussed in the context of the psychotherapeutic relationship (Sue & Sue, 1990), the influence of one's stage of racial/cultural identity development on the relationship between an African American student and his/her role model should also be assessed for its affect on that student's subsequent career development.

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